# THEY DESIRE TO SERVE

A SHORT GUIDE TO ENROLLING, ENGAGING AND ENCOURAGING VOLUNTEERS

IQBAL J. UNUS

Volunteers are the most critical capital of a community organization. They are particularly invaluable in organizations that are founded on faith or culture. Often the success and failure of an organization is hinged on how well it employs the unique talent and commitment that volunteers bring. There are a vast number of books on volunteerism for those interested in exploring the subject in depth. This book is intended only as a beginner's guide for those new to this area and as a refresher for those more experienced.

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# DEDICATION

To those who serve – known and unknown…

# They Desire to Serve

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# PREFACE

Volunteers are the most critical capital of a community organization. They are particularly invaluable in organizations that are founded on faith or culture. Often, the success and failure of an organization is hinged on how well it employs the unique talent and commitment that volunteers bring.

There are a vast number of books on volunteerism for those interested in exploring the subject in depth. This book is intended only as a beginner's guide for those new to this area and as a refresher for those more experienced. Within the pages of this primer is discussion of the motivation of volunteers and tips on how organization leaders may best utilize the efforts of volunteers through a simple 3E model. The 3E model is made up of three essential elements to successfully utilizing volunteers. These elements include: Enrolling, Engaging and Encouraging. Written with leaders and senior staff of faith-based community organizations in mind, this book focuses on the essential relationship between leadership and volunteers and how that relationship, when nurtured, can help their organization succeed, or, when neglected, could cause it to fail.

The contribution of volunteers has a direct impact on the financial viability of an organization, and prudent leaders pay personal attention to this aspect of how the organization functions.

The essence of volunteerism is making a difference, writes Mark Winfield in *The Essential Volunteers Handbook*. Oftentimes a volunteer sees the need to intervene or contribute when it is obvious that there is gap between what is and what could be, such as hunger or poverty that could be alleviated. At other times, a volunteer responds to

a need that presents itself and demands action beyond the capabilities of those affected, such as a natural disaster. From situations and circumstances that need steady and planned response to those that call for speedy and short-term support, volunteerism adds to the resources that can turn the tide. From high-level skill-demanding tasks to dirty-your-hands labor-intensive work, volunteerism represents an engagement that fulfills a desire to serve and a feeling that one has brought into the world what was missing, be it freedom from hunger or peace on earth.

The success of volunteer involvement in an organization also depends on the ability of the leadership to identify the special talents and interests of volunteers and match them with their assignment. In *The Other Eight Percent: Turning Your Church's Spectators into Active Participants*, Scott Thumma and Warren Bird suggest that the matching of talent and task takes "volunteering past 'slot filling' and towards service that builds people's spiritual lives..."

Data generated by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, shows that between September 2012 and September 2013, "the main organization--the organization for which the volunteer worked the most hours during the year--was most frequently religious (33.0 percent of all volunteers), followed by educational or youth service related and social or community service organizations." Therefore, the exposition of volunteerism in this book is directed mainly at religiously motivated and faith-based organizations, even though it is applicable to most volunteer driven groups.

The Corporation for National and Community Service, chartered by the U.S. Congress, offered noteworthy information on volunteering and civic life in America in 2015. For example, for the benefit of volunteer-driven organizations, it points out that "Volunteers are almost twice as likely to donate to charity as non-volunteers. Nearly 80% of volunteers donated to charity,

compared to 40 percent of non-volunteers." Furthermore, for the benefit of individual volunteers, it reports that "Volunteers have 27% higher odds of finding a job after being out of work than non-volunteers, possibly due to developing new skills and expanding personal networks."

Lastly, volunteers in faith-based organizations draw their motivation, inspiration and energy from their divine scriptures, which form the underpinnings of their faith. While relevant references to divine wisdom and teachings are found in all scriptures, I have chosen to quote references from the Qur'an and the Hadith, the foundational texts of the Islamic faith. Readers of other faiths and persuasion can restate or replace them with their own scriptural teachings with similar meanings.

In large part, this short book is a fully updated, enlarged and re-edited version of an essay that first appeared in the May-June 2006 issue of Islamic Horizons, the flagship magazine of Islamic Society of North America (ISNA). Thanks are due to the leadership of the the Islamic Society of North America, International institute of Islamic Thought, and Alwaleed Center for Muslim Christian Relations for access to opportunities and resources that have helped shape the ideas presented here.

What do you expect to learn from this book?

# I

# THEY DESIRE TO SERVE

*May I never get too busy in my own affairs that I fail to respond to the needs of others with kindness and compassion. —Thomas Jefferson*

Increasing interest in volunteerism is the driving force behind the growth of the "third sector," according to *The Third Sector: Comparative Studies of Nonprofit Organizations.* The "third sector" is defined as a complex of nonprofit, nongovernmental organizations that serves the public good and creates "public value." Public value is the organization principle that enables nonprofit organizations to contribute to society, as explored in *Creating Public Value in Practice: Advancing the Common Good in a Multi-Sector, Shared-Power, No-One-Wholly-in-Charge World.* In faith-based volunteer-driven organizations, volunteer activity is motivated by a desire to serve which is grounded in personal faith and conviction.

All religions and faiths teach that selfless and self-sacrificing service to others represents the highest pinnacle of one's human-ness. Among Muslims, for example, the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of God be on him) inspire a volunteer spirit through dictums such as "People are dependents of God; the closest to Him are the most useful to His dependent," and "Whosoever removes a worldly grief from a believer, God will remove from him one of the grieves of the Day of Judgment". Prophet Muhammad also encouraged

recognition of voluntary service - a basic practice for retaining volunteers - by saying "He who does not thank people does not thank God."

Volunteer activism has been the basis of a prosperous and prevailing civil society in world history. In his best known work, *Democracy in America*, the famous French political thinker and historian Alexis-Charles-Henri Clérel de Tocqueville, who travelled across the United States, pronounced that "The health of a democratic society may be measured by the quality of functions performed by private citizens." In most of the developing world, encompassing much of Africa, Asia and the Middle East, this tradition of voluntary citizen participation is being revived and strengthened, even as political maturity has deteriorated. Indeed, the volunteer spirit at the core of faith-based way of life – Islamic, Christian, or Jewish – offers true hope for the revival of a civil society so essential to the nourishment of democratic institutions in the world today.

## Dimensions of Volunteerism

The definition of volunteerism spans four principal dimensions, the first of which, according to Jeffrey L. Brudney in *The Effective Use of Volunteers: Best Practices for the Public Sector*, is free choice, or "the degree to which the decision to volunteer is free or un-coerced." Webster's New World Dictionary defines a voluntary action to be one that is "brought about by one's own free choice; given or done of one's own free will; freely chosen or undertaken." Authors of *Civil Society at the Millennium* consider that

> "Volunteering is an act committed in free choice. It is a decision taken in response to our own personal value and belief system at the deepest point. The process follows a wish to change something, a free choice to consider the

> wish, a prizing or valuing of the personal wish and finally the decision to act upon the wish and to make it happen. ... We do not have to 'volunteer for good.' The act of volunteering does not have a morality in itself. We could choose to volunteer for destruction, for harm, or for evil - and some do."

The **second** dimension of the definition concerns the nature of monetary compensation, if any, received by the volunteer. This can range from none at all, to reimbursement for expenses incurred in the activity, to a stipend or minimal pay given to participants. Generally speaking, volunteers are not provided monetary compensation for their effort, but reimbursement for their expenses is permitted. The **third** dimension relates to the context or auspices under which the volunteer activity takes place. Volunteering may be informal and outside of a structured organization (for example, helping a neighbor or friend), or it may occur in a formal, organized setting, such as a social or religious institution, a community center, a nonprofit organization or a welfare service agency. Finally, the **fourth** dimension of the definition of volunteering refers to the intended beneficiaries of the voluntary activity. The aim of volunteers may be to benefit or help strangers, friends, relatives, themselves, or some combination of these beneficiaries.

In short, volunteers are persons who work without pay, usually under the direction of an authorized supervisor, in support of known objectives, to enhance defined collective goals. Volunteer activity occurs in an organizational context. Volunteers' efforts are not rewarded with monetary compensation even though their out-of-pocket expenses are reimbursed; their time is given freely to benefit clients of host organizations, even though volunteers may also benefit from the experience. Additionally, work they do fulfills ongoing responsibilities of the host organization for delivering services or maintaining itself.

## Volunteering in faith-based Organizations

Broadly speaking, volunteer activity is motivated by a desire to serve based on personal faith and conviction. For Muslims, for example, the Prophet Muhammad's declaration that "The leader of the nation is their servant," is a meaningful motivational factor in their decision to volunteer." Similarly, among people of the Christian faith, the concept of Servant Leadership is a powerful motivation for voluntary service.

The motivation to serve is also found in the Prophetic saying that "People are the dependents of God; the closest to Him are those who are most useful to His dependents." The Prophet Muhammad raised the selfless helping of others selflessly to a higher level of commitment by saying, "Whosoever removes a worldly grief from a believer, God will remove from him one of the grieves of the Day of Judgment." The Bible exhorts the believer in 1 Peter 4:10 that "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace." In Acts 20:35 the believer is reminded that he must help the weak and believe that "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Most faith motivated individuals volunteer within their community organization, and often after being asked by other volunteers or friends. In such cases, by and large, volunteers are fairly well-acquainted with one another before they begin volunteering. Since most commitments to volunteer originate within community organizations where families are also involved, spouses, off-springs or parents also tend to volunteer. As a result, faith motivated volunteers generally expect informality in volunteer work relationships.

## Reasons for Volunteering

One of the leading reasons why people volunteer is that they feel a charitable impulse - an **obligation to help others**. People of faith see service to others as an act that will reap rewards for them in the Hereafter. They feel they are part of one *ummah* (a community of faith) and must help one another. They sometimes exercise this charitable impulse in the hope that they will receive help in return when they are in need of it. Further, they recognize the wisdom of the Prophet Muhammad's hadith that the hand of God is with the group (*jama'ah*), working together.

Another reason why people volunteer is that they wish **to exercise their skills** and put their talents to use - to sharpen or stretch their skills. They may actually want to practice what they have learnt at work in a less exacting environment - or they may want to learn new ways of doing things that they may use at work. For this reason, volunteers whose assignments best utilize their abilities, skills, talents and interests are among the most enthusiastic and committed to their organizations.

Some people volunteer because they have the urge to **return the favor** that society has done to them – to give something back to society. Their community may have provided them intangible benefits such as a wholesome environment to grow up in, or tangible advantages such as educational opportunities. They feel they must do something in return so that others may receive the same benefits that they received.

**Why they volunteer?**

- *obligation to help others*
- *exercise their skills*
- *return the favor*
- *meet like-minded people.*
- *attain a position of leadership*

Other people may volunteer simply so that they can **meet like-**

**minded people**, make friends, and socialize with them – to meet new people. Such people may be selective in where they volunteer depending on the kind of people they like to associate with. In faith-based communities this can be a powerful draw to bring newcomers into community organizations, mosques, churches, synagogues and other places where people of faith congregate. Working together can then lead to stronger and even permanent relationships.

Yet another reason why people volunteer is that they may be able to **attain a position of leadership** more easily in volunteer organization than they can through promotion at work – to acquire authority. This exercise of leadership may give them a feeling of self-fulfillment which they may lack at their jobs.

Current members of an organizations are always the best source of volunteers. Besides volunteering themselves, they can help identify others who may be available and interested in helping out. In any community or organization there are those who have retired from their work life and are now able, and often anxious, to contribute to the well-being of others. They have the experience, wisdom, patience and time to be good volunteers, if they receive the right kinds of assignment.

## Managing a Volunteer-based Organization

Leading and managing an organization whose human resources are predominantly volunteers presents unique challenges. These challenges relate to critical issues that are common to for-profit businesses as well, but call for a higher level of inter-personal communication and motivation skills in no-profits. Critical issues recognized in

managing a volunteer-based organization are (a) mission definition, (b) board as a resource, (c) good people management, and (d) relationship with volunteers.

While the definition of an organization's mission is a necessary condition for the growth and survival of all types of organizations, **mission definition is critically important** for volunteer organizations. This is so because, by their nature, voluntary organizations do not have a well-understood bottom line. The profit scale is not adequate to judge their effectiveness when they are often delivering intangible service, such as counseling, and achieving intangible results, such as reduced human suffering. The motivation for the organization and its volunteers comes not from attaining a certain level of profitability, but fulfilling a certain well-defined mission. That is why well-managed volunteer organizations define their missions as precisely as they can and stick to that definition as closely as possible. Their success comes from their ability to enable their volunteers to fulfill that distinct mission.

The organization's principal policymaking body, often called the **board of directors is a crucial organizational resource**. Well-managed volunteer organizations seek, elect or recruit board members for several reasons, but largely for their specific expertise in issues of relevance to the organization. Each board member is expected to head a working committee dealing with one of those issues. In this way, the organization makes the volunteer board of directors a resource that can tap other volunteer resources in the community as well.

Managing is a process of organizing work and treating people in ways that will inspire them to be as productive as possible. **Managing the time and service of volunteers** is similar. Volunteers' time and service must be managed with the basic understanding that volunteers need clear objectives, constructive feedback and opportunity for meaningful input. The main difference between paid staff

and volunteers is that you cannot always control volunteers' schedule. Unlike staff, volunteers want to work on carefully defined projects with a clear beginning and end. They may insist on using the skills and expertise they have developed on their job, often on specific short-term projects. Well-managed volunteer organizations become smart at working in a focused way with volunteers, who often have limited time to give. Such organizations do what it takes to keep volunteers motivated and committed.

Most sought after volunteers have at least four personal characteristics:

- personal strengths, including qualities that contribute to having a strong and stable personality with high character,
- expertise, such as capabilities that contribute to accomplishing organizational goals,
- contacts, including knowledge of and about people who can be helpful in accomplishing the organization's mission, and
- recruitment ability, such as familiarity with techniques and approaches to get others involved.

Keeping this in mind, a volunteer organization that seeks success must

- recruit members with appropriate expertise for its needs – whether for board of directors, standing committees, or particular projects,
- understand how to manage volunteers' skills, time and energy,
- assign volunteers to specific jobs that match their skills, and, in general,
- learn to work well with people.

Good volunteers need a challenge. Some effective non-profits recruit 'knowledge workers' for their expertise and ask them to take over many of the professional and managerial duties in the organization. They know that if they assign a volunteer a task that does not challenge and

interest him or her, he or she may not even finish the assignment, much less ask for more work. **Volunteers have to feel they are fulfilling a need.** If volunteer directors do not package jobs attractively, they will lose those volunteers, even if they get them interested to begin with. Therefore, successful volunteer-driven organizations develop clear objectives to guide them in how they work with volunteers.

The volunteer recruitment and retention (VRR) task force at a Muslim community organization in Virginia provides an example in its objectives statement:

> "Develop a volunteer information base, inspire volunteers to serve the community through ADAMS, place them in skill-appropriate assignments, evaluate their contribution, and keep them motivated to continue to serve."

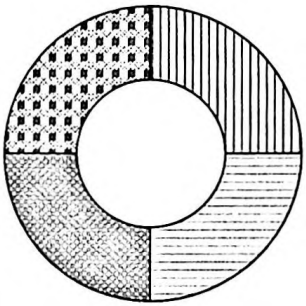
Volunteer programs do not survive in a vacuum and effectiveness of a volunteer program is related directly to the effectiveness of the organization's performance. Volunteers are attracted to organizations that **plan** their activities, **recruit** volunteers efficiently, **orient** and train them, and **maintain** their interest in the work of the organization (the **PROM** formula).

Good volunteers avoid organizations in which the leadership is working from crisis to crisis. They are productive only when they feel they are doing something that will be valuable within the framework of a structured program. Consequently, the more organized and the more specific the organization's action plan is, the more successful its volunteer involvement program will be. Knowing what the action plan calls for, volunteers can decide if they can make a meaningful contribution, and volunteer coordinators or managers can decide if these volunteers can perform the jobs that need to be done.

A designated staff member or a senior volunteer can act as a volunteer coordinator or manager provided this person has the confidence of the leadership and access to

strategic decisions made by the governing body. Nothing is more damaging to a volunteer's enthusiasm and performance than to find their work out of sync with the direction and priorities of the organization to which they are committing their time and energy.

**PROM**
**The Ring of Success!**



- Plan activities
- Recruit volunteers
- Orient them
- Maintain their interest

# II

# THE 3E MODEL

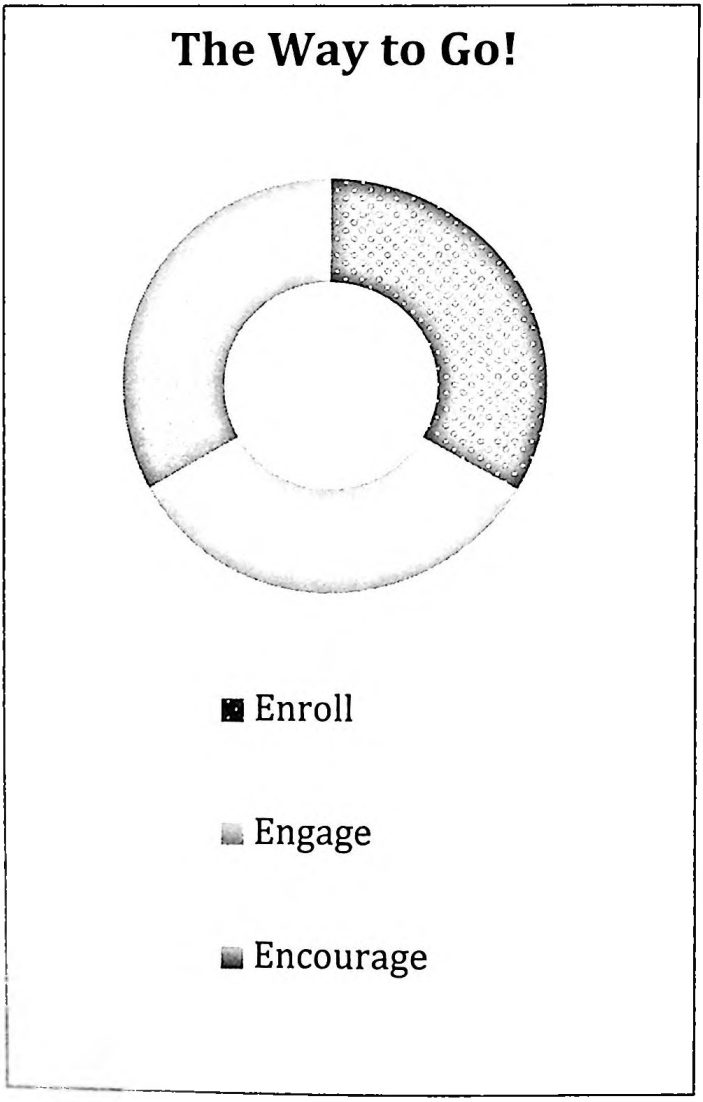
*I am only one, but still I am one. I cannot do everything, but still I can do something; and because I cannot do everything, I will not refuse to do something that I can do. – Helen Keller*

The 3Es represent a model for effective management of a volunteer program. The E's stand for the three phases in volunteer involvement within an organization.

- First: *Enrolling*, including recruiting, orienting, placing;
- Second: *Engaging*, including leading and delegating, and
- Third: *Encouraging*, including recognizing.

In a nutshell, volunteers need to be first recruited, then delegated to perform, and finally recognized for their accomplishment. Simple as it is, the process does not necessarily work effectively unless the leadership pays special attention to how it cultivates and utilizes this crucial resource. Often, in a well-developed organizations, a volunteer manager or director may be needed to guide and oversee this process.

The 3Es also identify a cyclical learning process in which a volunteer manager or director can improve the organization's recruiting effort by learning from how recruited volunteers performed in the past and how they responded to being recognized and motivated to continue.


The Way to Go!
Enroll
Engage
Encourage

# ENROLLING
## Before They Begin

The process of recruiting volunteers begins by defining available jobs and writing job descriptions, and then listing and detailing all jobs that are available for volunteer work. At the very least, a table like the one shown below may be used to describe the job, what kind and extent of training is needed, and will be provided to enable the volunteer to do his or her job well, and in what way performance is measured to ensure that goals are accomplished.

*Basic Elements of a Volunteer Profile – A Sample*

| | |
|---|---|
| Special Skills | Database applications; Inter-personal communication |
| Experience | Counseling and Mentorship of young Muslims; Research assistance for professors |
| Education | M.S. in Sociology; Diploma in Social Work |
| Motivation | Help improve the community |
| Experience (skills) | Two years teaching at a college; Survey Coordinator for Census Bureau |
| Interests Background | Working with people, teaching, writing |

Commitment and dependability are absolutely the most important ingredients in successful volunteer involvement. One of the best ways to ensure both is through volunteer agreements. Volunteers can be asked to sign contracts outlining what they have agreed to do. This helps greatly because the job they are expected to do will be clearer and more meaningful to them if the terms of work are formalized. An organization's volunteer coordinator or leadership can encourage volunteers to

- sign contracts outlining what they have agreed to do,
- list what they expect from the supervisors by way of support, and
- document a detailed job description to help ensure job satisfaction in the long run. This last item also encourages managers to identify the crucial elements of the job at hand.

It is also important to establish a profile of each volunteer, through an in-depth interview, for example. Such a profile could be recorded in a table such as the one that follows.

*Basic Contents of a Job Description*

| |
|---|
| What is the job? |
| What does it include? |
| Purpose(s) / Responsibilities |
| Where it is located? |
| With whom will you work? |
| Colleagues / Supervisor(s) |
| How long is the job? |
| When does it begin? |
| What's your skill set? |
| What training will be provided? |

If an organization has been pursuing a policy of involving volunteers on a regular basis, it will most likely have a volunteers' data bank from which to draw names. Such a database will perhaps also contain areas of expertise and interest of each volunteer, and can be used to call upon those who have volunteered before. The following discussion clarifies the process of identifying volunteers, establishing a volunteer database where there is none, and recruiting new volunteers with proper qualifications at the time of need.

## Recruiting

Recruitment is widely acknowledged to be the most difficult of all tasks in volunteer administration. The first recommended best practice is to secure the support of the top tier leadership of the organization for the volunteer program. Next, create job descriptions for volunteer positions.

Unless an organization has determined why volunteers are needed and the specific jobs they will be asked to perform, effective recruitment, training, management, and evaluation of unpaid workers present almost unsurmountable challenges.

The difficult task of recruiting potential volunteers begins once they have been identified. The identified volunteers have to be asked to volunteer. This is done in a number of ways.

A letter is the easiest way to start asking, but it is only useful as an opener. However personalized it may be, a letter will be often taken as a general invitation or appeal. If it contains a response form, one may get a few commitments through this channel.

A telephone call to follow-up on a letter is a very effective way of getting a positive response. A call by itself may yield results if you personally know the potential

volunteer.

Often potential volunteers make oral or written commitments to help out when they are personally affected by, or are involved in, some of the organization's programs. Effective recruiters always *follow up* on those commitments. This is a sure way of getting volunteers at the time of need.

A well-prepared brochure outlining the need of, and opportunities for, volunteers should be a permanent feature of the effective organization's promotional materials and reports. Such a brochure can be

- distributed at meetings with a verbal appeal,
- printed in publications with a response form, and
- mailed to current volunteers with encouragement to recruit others. Such a brochure is often accompanied by another document that lays out written policies that govern the volunteer program.

## Orienting, Placing, and Training

A new or even a seasoned volunteer is weary of doing something that is not in line, or has fallen out of line, with the organization's ways of doing things – its policies and procedures, its core values, or its central purposes. Therefore, an orientation program, delivered one-on-one or to a group, is almost a pre-requisite to ensure the volunteer's comfort and success. Such an orientation program can be designed to offer an overview of the organization and its vision and mission and strategic goals, and to familiarize a volunteer with the organization's culture and method of operation.

While an orientation offers the volunteer a mental road map of how to proceed, organized training helps him or her to effectively direct effort and energy to achieving desired outcomes. Basic training covers preparation for

jobs to be performed by volunteers, including mastering of specific skills – such as operating necessary equipment – knowledge of established procedures, and troubleshooting to a desirable extent. Another critical skill, and often lacking in volunteers, is problem solving – the ability to look at an unresolved situation and theorize and extrapolate a solution based on the 'big picture', past experiences, and even intuition. Initial basic training is followed by ongoing or in-service training to ensure that everyone remains aware of, and is up-to-date, with changing policies and procedures.

## Accommodating and Facilitating

One of the most significant ways in which the work of volunteers and their contribution to the success of their organization differs from that of the staff is the need for flexibility in time and location. Volunteers cannot always work on a 9 to 5 schedule, and sometimes they cannot even work out of the organization's office. Effective use of their time and energy requires coming up with creative ways to schedule work, and designation of off-location workplaces, including their own homes, when appropriate. The degree and manner of supervision of work done off-location and off-hours is a challenge for the volunteer supervisor, but the rewards justify the effort. Such accommodation and facilitation also require special efforts to meet any special needs of volunteers as well as to comply with any applicable ADA requirements.

*Training for the Job – A Sample*

| The Job | Training Needed and Provided | Expected Outcome |
|---|---|---|
| A membership renewal campaign involving a motivational letter followed, up by telephone contact. | Workshop on persuasive writing; workshop on effective telephone communication. | A defined percent of those contacted (e.g. 30%) promising to renew. |
| Host and show around distinguished visitors. | Workshop on the history, mission, and current programs of the organization; a workshop on appropriate cultural and ethnic courtesies. | One or more visitor(s) impressed with how they were received and what they learned. |
| Publish newsletter. | Workshop on mechanics of newsletter publishing; meeting(s) with leadership about organizational priorities and perspectives. | Newsletters issues that convey the organization's message and publicize its work effectively (as determined by reader surveys). |
| Organize Annual Event | Workshop on planning and implementing, and working with a team. | Successful event with desired results achieved. |

## VOLUNTEER BANK

For volunteer work at a localized level, a personal interview or some type of 'interest card' collected at a local gathering suffices to identify potential volunteers. When personal contact is not possible, one or more of other information gathering techniques may help. Such techniques include maintaining a resource file of potential volunteers, based on sources such as membership records, and responses to surveys of member attitudes toward the programs and goals of the organization. In addition, a directory of information about current volunteer helps to identify active and inactive members. Whenever any current volunteer leaders meet with groups at community events, they can gather names and addresses of members who show interest, and add these to the above-mentioned resource file.

Member surveys and forums about the organization's activities are useful because the greater a member's interest in an activity, the more likely it is that he or she will become a volunteer. In addition, a systematic examination of membership correspondence can be a source of data on member interest in the organization's activities. Unless members feel they are having some input into the way the organization is run, they may not become seriously involved.

A Volunteer Bank should also facilitate access to special groups within the community, such as retired and elderly community members. Maintaining information on life events (with permission, of course), such as marriages, anniversaries, and retirement also helps communicate with potential volunteers at times when they may be most receptive to volunteering requests.

# ENGAGING
## After They Begin

One of the principal constraints in working with volunteer is that volunteers want to give time to their volunteer work according to their own schedule, which is sometimes not convenient for the regular staff. Effective organizations find ways to maximize the volunteers' contribution despite this limitation. For instance, with women going into the workforce in larger numbers, active women volunteers are changing as a group. From homemakers possessing some flexibility and control in their use of time and patience in their dealings, more and more are opting to be full-time workers possessing less of both, flexibility in time and in patience. The following approaches can help get the most from volunteer assistance, regardless of gender or age.

• *Utilizing Time Effectively: Breakdown large jobs into smaller components.*

Recognizing that volunteers want to give time at their own convenience, one may use the 'short-project' method of getting the job done by breaking jobs down into their component parts, and thus catering to the interests and schedules of volunteer workers. Streamlining jobs and empowering volunteers can lead to optimizing the use of their time.

• *Making Work Relevant: Match type of job with type of volunteer.*

Volunteer recruiters and supervisors must 'market' the job well to appeal to volunteers by highlighting the type of volunteers needed, how the job is relevant to their interests, and relating both to what the organization is striving to accomplish. They must show how that specific job relates to the organization's mission, and how a volunteer's efforts can make the difference between the a

job done well or not. A mismatch between job assignment and available skills is a lost opportunity to develop a loyal, long-term volunteer.

• *Minimizing Meetings: Schedule meeting sparingly and at volunteers' convenience.*

Most volunteers dislike meetings, and many cannot afford to spare the time and energy to attend them. Therefore, minimizing the number of meetings, setting them up to fit the volunteers' convenience as much as possible, and making them as productive as possible, encourages volunteers' continuing commitment.

• *Giving Some Latitude: Define the job, allowing some freedom in how it is done.*

Volunteers appreciate having some latitude in how to accomplish their tasks, so it helps to empower them by letting them make certain decisions and utilizing assigned resources as they see fit within defined limits. Whenever possible, the job should be well-defined and the results expected in broader rather than narrower terms, giving the volunteer some leeway to work with self-supervision.

On the other hand, it is also true that the more one asks of volunteers, the better they will perform, When they are treated as professionals – albeit unpaid - including in matters such as performance appraisals and termination, they may rise to higher expectations.

• *Providing Orientation: Introduce volunteers to the organization and how it works.*

Orientation has already begun at the moment an organization makes the initial contact with potential volunteers. In orientation - conducted by using, for example, written material, videos or formal classes - volunteers learn about the mission of the organization and how their individual efforts can help achieve it. Showing volunteers how they fit in the big picture is a critical element in securing their commitment and loyalty.

• *Offering Training: Coach volunteers about the work and the*

*working environment.*

Once they accept their assignment, volunteers expect to be trained about their work and provided with resources in order to do their job. A series of structured training programs can help train a volunteer to be an effective worker in a specific work environment. Such programs may vary from informal briefings, to group meetings, to specially designed sessions with audio-visual presentations. Regardless of form, training accomplishes the following:

- provides volunteers with all the background data that they will need regarding the work environment, by-laws, policies, committee structure and action plans;
- explains exactly what their involvement will be with facts and figures, and
- reviews historical data as well as future expectations from the assignment.

From another crucial perspective, training needs of volunteers can be grouped into three areas:

- training volunteers in what they need to do,
- training staff about what volunteers will do, and
- training staff and volunteer to work with one another.

Clarifying volunteer and staff roles in any specific project in which volunteers are involved helps ensure smooth working and superior results.

## LEADING/MANAGING/CHALLENGING

Leading and managing volunteers through effective supervision and guidance, including mentoring when applicable, is a critical element in the success or failure of a volunteer program. Effective faith-based organizations lead and manage volunteer well, but also go beyond that, to offering challenges that inspire committed volunteers to perform to the best of their ability. Volunteers are motivated to accept and honor responsibility as advised by

Prophet Muhammad: "Every one of you is a shepherd and every shepherd is responsible for what he is shepherd of." They are motivated to give their best as the Prophet said: "God has decreed that for everything there is a better way."

There are at least four specific factors that contribute to the potential success of volunteers.

First, leaders and staff of an organization must allocate significant time to **volunteer administration** and management.

Second, they must train and professionally develop employees who work with volunteers, so as to reduce conflict between the two groups and enhance **cooperation and coordination**.

Third, they must provide **liability insurance** coverage for volunteers in order remove any hesitation in taking reasonable decision-making risks essential to better performance.

Fourth, they must provide a **budget** for the volunteer program for activities, training and reimbursement of out of pocket expenses, for example. This is important because when out of pocket costs are not reimbursable, some very effective volunteers may not be able to volunteer. To allow people of all economic means and social status to serve comfortably as volunteers, organizations often provide for "enabling funds" in their budget. As Susan Ellis states in "From the Top Down: The Executive Role in Volunteer Program Success," "enabling funds" allow people from all economic and social strata to give their services freely. If consideration is not given to out-of-pocket costs, many programs will have as volunteers only those people who can afford the 'luxury' of volunteering.'

## Delegating/Tasking/Communicating

The art of delegating is a critical skill for leaders and managers in any circumstance, but is even more crucial when leaders and managers are dealing with volunteers. The opportunity to inform and train volunteers may be somewhat more limited than would be considered ideal for staff, so success of a project may hang on personal skills in how to delegate and assign tasks. At the same time, volunteers who are recipients of delegated tasks benefit from understanding the process of delegation.

Delegating to volunteers require greater clarity in tasking and communicating than would be the case in delegating to staff. This is because volunteers may not have – despite all the orienting and training – the same level of information and appreciation for nuances as staff may. They may also be not fully in touch with changes in circumstances and resources that may occur on a day to day basis, affecting their assignments and the results expected from them.

Communication with volunteers should preferably be through documents that they and the delegator can refer to for clarity. For larger organizations with a volunteers administrator in place, a periodical newsletter may also be helpful in keeping them up-to-date with the goings on of the organization. For committees of volunteers, it helps to assign a particular staff members to assist the committee during its tenure, as opposed to whoever is available to assist.

Since volunteers are not as fully engaged with the operational leadership of the organization as regular staff, it is also helpful to hold periodic (not too often!) 'town hall' meetings with all volunteers to bring them up-to-date and to develop a sense of camaraderie among them.

*Eternal Wisdom*
*Keys to Successful Delegating*

When God asked Moses to leave his people for forty days, Moses put them under the supervision of Aaron. In other words, he delegated the leadership of the community and the management of its affairs to his teammate. In doing so, Moses defined the delegated task in broad terms as follows:

> ".... And Moses had charged his brother Harun (before he went up): 'Act for me amongst my people: Do right, and follow not the way of those do mischief.' " (Qur'an: Al A'raf, 7:142).

Moses illustrated three important aspects of effective delegation in this case.

First, he delegated broadly but clearly by charging Aaron to act for him amongst his people. Second, he clarified his expectation - the intended objective - by asking Aaron to do right. Third, he placed appropriate limits on the delegated authority by asking Aaron not to follow the way of those who do mischief.

Thus delegation, from this perspective, consists of defining (a) what is the task, (b) what should be the end result, and (c) what are the boundaries within which the task should be performed and results accomplished. The interaction between the one delegating (Moses) and the one who is delegated (Aaron) is circumscribed by factors that are often neglected in the process of delegation – responsibility, authority, and priority.

# ENCOURAGING
## How to keep them coming back

The bottom-line in finding and keeping volunteers is ensuring that volunteers feel they have received something back for their time, whether it is as tangible as an award or as intangible as personal satisfaction. To encourage volunteers to keep volunteering, the organizations' leadership must make sure that volunteers' overall interaction with them includes some of the following experiences:

- They have met new people,
- They have learned new skills,
- They have reinforced their own leadership and participatory decision making skills,
- They have made a difference in the organization or the community, and/or
- They have advanced within the profession, or, as in the case of new professionals, made contacts for jobs or career advancement.

### MOTIVATING FOR INVOLVEMENT

Motivating volunteers goes beyond simply keeping them involved. To motivate them to assume and discharge responsibilities with enthusiasm and energy, volunteer supervisors must foster a climate that will arouse interest, build enthusiasm, provide inspiration, and increase individual participation in the organization. To increase the level of commitment in members who volunteer to work with them, faith-based organizations needs to help foster attitudes and feelings in them, such as:

- Brotherhood — the need for wholesome relationships and interaction within the faith community;
- Achievement — the desire to see their work result in

tangible outcomes that are aligned with their belief system;

- Security — the desire to protect their community from actions that run counter to the demands of their faith;
- Responsibility —the desire to work out problems that are hindering the advancement of their faith among individuals and in the community;
- Creative expression — the desire to express themselves within their faith paradigm in various forms of media, such as poetry, calligraphy, art design, etc.;
- Sense of service — the desire to be of value to others for the sake of God;
- Growth — the need to become more committed believers;
- Identity — the pride of being persons of faith who have the desire to live their faith.

## Reporting/Evaluating

As would be the case with staff performance, the work done by volunteers needs to be reported and evaluated on a systemic basis. Successful volunteer programs ensure that accurate information regarding the volunteers' participation in the organization is received and recorded in the organization's data banks, whether manually or computerized. Having access to this information is a prerequisite for any meaningful evaluation of volunteer performance and potential.

It is important to evaluate the relationship between the application of best practices discussed earlier and the perceived benefits emanating from volunteer participation.

## Your Notes

# III

# MORE ABOUT VOLUNTEERISM

*The moral test of a society is how that society treats those who are in the dawn of life -- the children; those who are in the twilight of life -- the elderly; and those who are in the shadow of life -- the sick, the needy, and the handicapped.--Hubert Humphrey*

## Staff or Volunteers?

When an organization wants to expand, and has adequate resources for that purpose, it may choose between hiring more paid staff or recruiting additional volunteers, or a combination of both. Organizations that are heavily dependent on volunteers to manage and operate their programs and services, whether directed or assisted by some paid staff, are in some ways different from those that depend largely on paid staff to function, assisted by some volunteers. In making the right decision, one may consider the shortcomings of the two types of organizations.

In volunteer-driven organizations, more time is needed to make decisions and reach consensus on issues requiring action than would be needed in staff-driven organizations. Generally, there is less organization and control in their functioning, and it is often more difficult to get volunteers to complete work because of their other commitments.

On the other hand, there is less membership involvement and commitment in a staff-driven organization as opposed to that in a volunteer-driven one.

It is also more difficult to get people to serve on its boards and committees. There is less rapport between staff and members in staff-driven organizations, and the expense for payroll is higher.

When an organization has both staff and volunteers shouldering its work, the distribution of work between staff and volunteers becomes a significant issue. Effective volunteer organizations use volunteers as 'think tanks' as well as 'do tanks'. They assign them work that provides volunteers a sense of accomplishment while improving their self image within the profession, and give them tasks that present real challenges while making their responsibilities meaningful. Such organizations do not always assign mere mechanical, routine work to volunteers.

## Legal Matters

It is important that the legal status of a volunteer not be confused with that of an employee. A volunteer is a person who performs work without coercion and without compensation. An employee is fully compensated for the time worked and is "coerced" by work schedule and location without choice. The organization, as an employer, has certain obligation toward an employee under Fair Labor Standards Act and Internal Revenue Service regulations – overtime pay, tax withholding, etc. – that it does not have toward a volunteer. The careful volunteer organization keeps the distinction between a volunteer and an employee clear by treating the two differently. Michael Stills states in *"Does Employment Law Affect Your Volunteer Program?"*, "Designating someone a 'volunteer' does not allow you to escape the eyes of the law. If it looks like an employee and acts like an employee, they very well may be seen as an employee in the eyes of the law."

## Best Practices in Practice

As explained by Jeffrey L. Brudney, studies seeking to identify best practices in public service organizations show that the most frequent best practices include

- recognition activities for volunteers,
- formal record-keeping and
- written policies governing the program.

Best practices also include:

- active outreach to recruit volunteers, and
- high-level organizational official support for recruitment efforts.

Also among practices of effective volunteer organization are:

- Job descriptions for volunteer positions,
- basic training for volunteer workers,
- orientation for new volunteers, and
- ongoing or in-service training for volunteers as they assume new responsibilities

The rest of the list of best practices among effective volunteer organizations is made up of:

- Training employees working with volunteers,
- budgeting for the volunteer program or offering reimbursement for the work-related expenses of volunteers,
- publishing a newsletter for volunteers,
- providing liability insurance coverage for volunteers,
- Entrusting responsibility to volunteers for managing other volunteers,

The best practice used least often is annual or periodic **evaluations** of volunteers.

According to Brudney, studies have shown that the amount of **time a volunteer coordinator spends** coordinating volunteer service has the greatest effect on improving volunteer productivity and benefiting the program. This indicates the importance of providing

training for employees who work with volunteers, giving volunteers the responsibility to manage other volunteers, and providing ongoing or in-service training for volunteers, which might help prepare them for management responsibilities in the program.

## Gift of Time

Fund-raising dinners are common among volunteer-driven organizations, but for faith-based volunteer-driven organizations, they are also an essential annual ritual. A twist on fund-raising dinner is a "time-raising" dinner, where an organization seeks to raise not money but time. The slogan is "Leave your checkbook at home!"

Organize the "time-raising" dinner as you would a fund-raising dinner, but design the pledge form and inspirational speeches to motivate the audience to commit time (and effort, naturally) to the organization. For example, a donor could make a one-time pledge of two hours a week during the year, or a continuing pledge of two hours a week, or an hour every other Tuesday, or commit to a whole variety of possible options. The pledge card should also solicit information about skills and interests. The organization can the call the donor to report for work as pledged and needed.

A time raising dinner can be fun and can establish a degree of commitment to the the organization not always achieved by fundraising. When the chips are down, the time and effort pledged by dedicated volunteers can make a true difference, and it can also help generate needed financial resources.

### HOW TO VALUE TIME

To achieve the best results from a time-raising dinner,

the organization's leadership must first educate its membership and the community at large about the value of the time they already donate. It may even be a good idea to develop a time budget, using man-hours instead of dollars on a spreadsheet. A balance sheet of time needed from volunteers, accompanied by a time-flow chart, can help demonstrate how much assistance is needed and when. Of course, while all dollars are equal in value, all man-hours are not; they are different in quality and intensity. Yet a time budget can convey the essential message that there is a deficiency that can only be made up with generous donations of time.

Another aspect of this analysis is establishing a monetary equivalence for the time already contributed by current volunteers and pledged by new and continuing time donors. The dollar value of time helps underscore the important role the volunteers play, although there is a slight risk that some volunteers may think they can reduce their financial contributions because they are already giving 'time dollars'. Leaders must emphasize and clearly establish the need for both time and money to accomplish the organization's goals.

Holding time-raising dinners is indeed a timely idea, and one that can inspire old and new volunteers to do more and do it more methodically.

Your Notes

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## Your Notes

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Iqbal J. Unus** holds a Ph.D. from Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia (Nuclear Physics, 1977). Notwithstanding his training, he has focused his professional career on the emerging Muslim presence in America, gaining distinctive insight into the progress of the Muslim American community. He is associated with the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), where he has worked since 1989 in various positions, including the director of its program The Fairfax Institute. Earlier, he was secretary general of the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA). He has published several articles in Islamic Horizons, a book chapter in *The Muslims' Place in the American Public Square*, and two children's books, as well as abridged *Apostasy in Islam: An Historical and Scriptural Analysis*, and edited *Muslim American Life: Reflections and Perspectives*, in addition to authoring a short book *Moses on Leadership*. He served on the Research Committee for The US Mosque Survey 2011. He is Visiting Fellow at Alwaleed Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding at Georgetown University. He advises Muslim nonprofits on strategic planning and organization. Beginning in 1970, he has volunteered in several community leadership roles, including past president of the Muslim Students Association of the U.S. and Canada (1975), former Majlis (Board) member and interim secretary general of ISNA, vice president of All Dulles Area Muslim Society (ADAMS), and continuing trustee of Amana Mutual Funds Trust. He received lifetime service awards from Council of American Islamic Relations in 2011 and from ISNA in 2012. He can be reached at Iqbalunus@gmail.com or at 202-263-UNUS.